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PRESS RELEASE

U.S. Ambassador “listens in” as Roma students share views

In recognition of April 8, International Roma Day, U.S. Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic met today with a group of eight high school and college students from the Roma community for a vibrant discussion of a range of issues.

“These articulate young people have much to say and much to contribute to the future of Macedonia,” said Milovanovic. “This was an opportunity for me to listen to them discuss their personal plans as well as their wider views on current events.”

The students are all participants in a U.S. government supported program aimed at helping Roma students remain in school and improve their academic achievement. The school retention rate among Roma students in the program has increased dramatically; the number of Roma who enrolled in secondary education doubled; and over 87% of university students in the program have successfully advanced to the next academic year.

The program is in accord with the Government of Macedonia’s National Strategy and National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion and is one of several education projects implemented by Roma NGOs with the support of international organizations. When fully implemented by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the National Strategy and National Action Plan should enhance opportunities for education, housing, health care, and employment for the Roma community, enabling them more fully to contribute to and participate in the democratic processes in the country.

April 8 was declared International Roma Day in 1971, at the first congress of the International Romani Union in London. It is a day for Roma to celebrate their common identity. Roma culture is a part of Europe’s cultural heritage and has always contributed to the richness of European societies. Today, there are about 10 million Roma in Europe.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

The American people, through USAID, have invested more than \$450 million in Macedonia since 1993. More than 20 projects worth \$30 million a year are currently being implemented. These projects are designed to support Macedonia’s transition to a free market-based, multi-ethnic democracy. They include initiatives to accelerate economic growth, develop democratic institutions, and educate citizens for a modern economy. USAID provides economic and

humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries. For more information please visit <http://macedonia.usaid.gov>

The Roma Education Program (REP) is implemented by Foundation Open Society Institute (FOSIM). The total value of the program is \$4.5m, United States Agency for International Development support is \$3.4 M. Other donors include FOSIM: \$700,000; Swiss Foundation Pestalozzi: \$300,000; Hungarian Embassy: \$20,000 euros; OSCE: \$70,000. REP provides a comprehensive education support to Roma youth at all levels of education (pre-school, primary, secondary, and tertiary), targeting 5 Roma settlements (2 in Skopje, 2 in Kumanovo and 1 in Prilep); 10 primary, 57 secondary schools, and 4 universities in Macedonia. A total of 1264 Roma students directly benefit from REP interventions (200 Roma pre-school children, 740 primary, 260 secondary and 64 university).